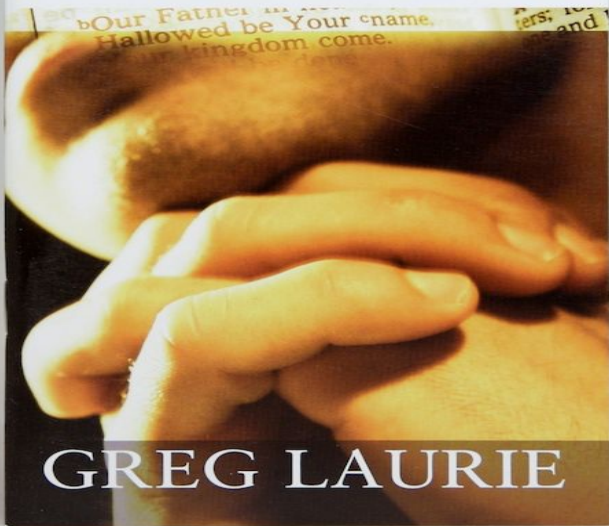


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Becoming a
Person of
PRAYER



GREG LAURIE

Becoming a Person of Prayer

Greg Laurie

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Chapter One

Learning to Pray As Jesus Taught Us

We are about to examine one of the most important practices of the Christian life. It is as essential to knowing God and growing spiritually as breathing is to living. I'm talking about the practice of prayer.

Prayer is not an option in the Christian life. It is a privilege. It is an adventure. And it is commanded. The Bible says that we should "pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:17, 18). Jesus Himself told His disciples that "men ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1).

Still, many of us are reluctant to pray. Perhaps it is because we do not really know how to pray, or we simply feel embarrassed about praying. At other times, we may fail to pray because we know that our lives are not right with God. Some people might even debate about the right posture of prayer.

I heard the story of three ministers who were debating the best posture for prayer. As they were talking, a telephone repairman was working on the phone system in the background. One minister shared that he felt the key was in the hands. He always held his hands together and pointed them upward as a form of

symbolic worship. The second suggested that real prayer was best conducted on your knees. The third suggested that they both had it wrong—the only position worth its salt was to pray while stretched out flat on your face.

By this time the telephone repairman couldn't stay out of the conversation any longer. He blurted out, "I have found that the most powerful prayer I ever made was while I was dangling upside down by my heels from a power pole, suspended 40 feet above the ground!"

The important thing is to pray! We should never neglect this vital aspect of our spiritual life. It has been said that prayer is the breath of the newborn soul—and there can be no Christian life without it. Prayer is your lifeline to your Heavenly Father.

Chapter Two

Jesus' Prayer Life

Consider the prayer life of Jesus Himself. In the Gospels, we often read of how Jesus withdrew from His disciples in order to pray, sometimes spending an entire evening in communion with His Father. When He was in Gethsemane, facing the horrors of His soon-coming crucifixion, Scripture says that He prayed and cast His burdens upon the Lord (see Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42).

E. M. Bounds, a pastor from the 1800s whose writings on prayer have become classics, had this to say about the priority of prayer in Jesus' life:

The praying of Christ was real. No man prayed as He prayed. Prayer pressed upon Him as a solemn, all-imperative, all-commanding duty, as well as a royal privilege in which all sweetness was condensed, alluring and absorbing. Prayer was the secret of His power, the law of His life, the inspiration of His toil and the source of His wealth, His joy, His communion and His strength. To Christ Jesus prayer occupied no secondary place, but was exacting and paramount, a necessity, a life, the satisfying of a restless yearning and a preparation for heavy responsibilities. (E. M. Bounds, *The Reality of Prayer* [New York: Revell, 1924], p. xx).

If Jesus, the very Son of God, placed such an emphasis on prayer in His own life, should we do any less? The disciples

recognized the importance of prayer. They had been examining Jesus' life and they realized that He obviously knew how to pray. That is why they came to Him one day and said, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).

That should be the heart cry of every Christian. In fact, prayer should be characteristic of our lives as followers of Christ. One of our greatest aims in life should be that we become known as a man or woman of prayer.

There is a great deal of confusion today regarding what prayer actually is. Prayer is not something that we offer to some force out there. It is not the kind of energy we offer up that has the ability to heal us in and of itself. It is not some sort of mystical experience in which we speak things into existence. Prayer is merely how we communicate with and hear from God Almighty. *True prayer takes place when our will is aligned with the will of God and we pray accordingly.*

Jesus' response to the disciples' request is what has come to be known as "The Lord's Prayer." Some people think of this prayer as a sort of mega prayer—the big gun to use when you are really in trouble. When you are backed up against the wall, if all else fails, pull out the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. . . ." (Matthew 6:9). If you pray that one, some may think, God will definitely hear you.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with praying that prayer verbatim. But it is more than just a prayer. It is a model for

prayer, a blueprint to follow. Jesus said,

In this manner, therefore, pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation.” (Matthew 6:9–13)

Notice that Jesus’ prayer does not start, “Our Father in heaven, *give us this day our daily bread*” (emphasis mine). That is how most people pray. “Lord, how are You doing? Here is what I need.” Then we go down our shopping list. That is not really proper prayer. Instead, Jesus said “In this manner” we should pray. He basically gave us a structure for our prayers.

In studying Jesus’ prayer, you will see that it can actually be divided into two sets of three different requests. The first three requests deal with the glory of God: “Hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done.” The second three requests deal with the needs of humankind: “Give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our debts, and do not lead us into temptation.”

Let me share something with you that might help you get a better idea of the structure of prayer. *There is no required formula, and there are circumstances when you will not have time for a structured prayer.* If you are in an auto accident or hanging 40 feet above the ground like the telephone repairman I mentioned, something along the lines of “Help!” will do.

When you take time to pray, however, consider this idea. It is an acronym using the word ACTS. Each letter stands for a specific aspect of prayer arranged in a natural order:

“A” stands for adoration (worship).

“C” stands for confession.

“T” stands for thanksgiving.

“S” stands for supplication.

This acronym for prayer, if practiced, will help you develop a more balanced and biblical prayer life.

Chapter Three

Adoration ACTS

Recognize That You Are Speaking to God

Jesus taught His disciples to begin their prayers with adoration. We do this by recognizing whom we are addressing: our Father in heaven. Not our butler in heaven. Not our servant in heaven. Not our vending machine in heaven. We are speaking to the Almighty God, the Creator of the universe. This puts things in perspective.

David would often begin his psalms with an acknowledgement of the greatness of God. It is important to consider such things as God's unlimited power, His infinite knowledge, as well as His holiness, love, and justice. When I take the time to contemplate God's attributes, I can get my thoughts and my attitude in order before I offer a word of petition.

Let's return to the simple phrase Jesus uses at the start of this prayer, "Our Father in heaven . . ." This was a radical statement to the average mindset of the day. The religious Jews had such a deep reverence and awe for God that they would not even utter His name. So when Jesus said, "Pray to our Father in

heaven,” that would have been thought of as blasphemous. In fact, when Jesus referred to God as His Father, the religious leaders accused Him of blasphemy.

Yet, at the time Jesus gave His disciples this prayer, He knew that something significant was taking place. He was establishing a new covenant. He would complete it through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Prior to the arrival of Christ, if you were a person of faith, you would have to approach God through a priest. He was your representative, your intercessor. He was the one who would go before God once a year on the Day of Atonement and offer an animal sacrifice, symbolically placing your sins (along with those of the rest of the nation) on an animal.

At that particular time you could not just go into God’s presence and have unlimited access to Him. You could not know Him in the same intimate and personal way as we can now. After Jesus rose again and was met by Mary Magdalene in the garden of Gethsemane, however, He said, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God” (John 20:17b).

That’s an amazing statement. Here Jesus made it clear that He was opening up a new way for us to approach God. Adding to this, the Apostle Paul writes in Romans, “You did not receive the Spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of

God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ . . .” (Romans 8:15–17a).

Some of us may have come from broken homes. Some of us may have never had a father. Still others may have had a father who was somewhat cold and disinterested. You were always vying for his attention, but he never seemed to really notice you for the most part. Sometimes we can carry that baggage from our childhood and transfer it to God. So when we read, “Our Father in heaven,” we have this concept of God as a disinterested or even absent Father figure. Yet, the Bible gives us a distinctly different picture.

As Paul said, we have received “the spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’” The word *Abba* is a Hebrew term of affection. If you were to go to Israel today, you would hear the little children call out to their fathers and say, “Abba, Abba”—their equivalent of “Daddy, Daddy.” Paul is essentially saying, “Listen, not only is God your Father. He is *Abba* Father. You can be intimate with Him. You can share your needs with Him. You can bare your heart to Him. That is the kind of relationship God wants to have with you.”

While Paul’s point is true, we must not neglect the big picture. Yes, He wants intimacy. Yes, He wants closeness. But let us not forget who this God is. God is ignorant of nothing, unlimited in power, and not bound by space and time. Yet, He is also just, good, righteous, holy, and loving. This simply means that His decisions and purposes are always right. They are not right

because we agree with Him or because we think that they are a good idea. They are right because God says they are right.

Contemplating God's character at the beginning of our prayers can have a dramatic effect upon what we are about to pray for. It reminds us of who God is—and who we are. It causes us to see how powerful He is—and how weak we are. It reminds us of how wise He is—and how ignorant we are. It keeps us from brashly storming into God's presence and reading off our grocery list of requests.

On one occasion in the Old Testament, Job was being foolish in some of the things that he said to God, and God brought him to his senses. Job then said, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand over my mouth" (Job 40:4).

God loves you, and He wants intimacy with you. But do not forget that you must be reverent to Him. You should not be afraid of approaching God; at the same time, you should not treat Him so casually that you begin to take Him for granted. We must never lose our sense of reverence as we come into the presence of God.

Hallow His Name

When you begin your prayer by acknowledging His infinite greatness along with His matchless love for you, your only reaction can be what is said in Matthew 6:9, "Hallowed be Your name." The word *hallowed* means that we are to attribute to God the holiness that is already His—and will always be His.

To hallow God's name is to revere, honor, and glorify Him. It is to obey Him as uniquely perfect. Therefore, when I pray, "Hallowed be Your name," I am saying, "Lord, I want You to be ruling over every aspect of my life. I want You to be glorified and honored in everything I do."

Sometimes we want it both ways. This is not unique to our time. Scripture records the story of one man whom Jesus called to follow Him. Instead of jumping at the opportunity, the man replied, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father" (Luke 9:59). What he wanted to do was really secondary. It is the words he said that are troubling. This man was actually saying, "Lord, me first."

Simon Peter was up on a housetop praying, when he fell into a trance and saw a vision. In this vision he saw a sheet lowered from heaven with every kind of unclean animal as described in the Mosaic Law. Peter heard a voice from heaven saying, "Kill and eat." Peter, in response, said, "Not so, Lord!" (Acts 10:14). To put it another way, Peter was saying, "No, Lord."

Here is the problem. If God is the Lord of your life, you cannot say, "Lord, me first" or "No, Lord." If He is, indeed, the Lord and ruler of your heart and life, the only thing you can say is, "Yes, Lord."

When I say, "Hallowed be Your name," I am saying that in my life and character I want to see Jesus Christ set apart in what I do. I want to live a holy life. Is that your desire right now as

you read this booklet? As you look at your interests, ambitions, and pursuits, can you say these things are for His glory? Could you write, “Hallowed be Your name,” over these things? If you cannot, you need to question whether you should be doing those things.

The early Protestant reformer Martin Luther once said, “How is God’s name hallowed among us? When both our doctrine and living are truly Christian.”

Seek His Will

Moving on in “The Lord’s Prayer,” we read, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). You should never be afraid to pray this request.

Sometimes people come up to me and want me to pray for them regarding an illness, a personal problem, or some other issue in their life. Although I will pray with them, I will always add, “Lord, we want Your will to be done, so we pray not that our will, but Yours be done.” In doing that, you are not canceling out your request, as some today would suggest. You are simply acknowledging that you do not have all the answers, and that you want God to overrule your request if it is out of line with His will.

Pray for the Coming of God’s Physical Kingdom on Earth

When we pray this prayer, we are praying on a number of levels. First, we are obviously praying for the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. The word that Jesus uses for *kingdom* does

not primarily refer to a geographical territory, but to a sovereignty and dominion. So we are saying, “Lord, come and establish Your kingdom.” In other words, we are looking forward to that day when Christ will come back to the earth and rule and reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

We must realize that our only hope for change in this world is for Christ’s kingdom to come and for His will to be done. We are never going to see a trouble-free planet until Christ comes back again. And then He will reign righteously. There will be no more scandals, no more violence. There will be no more war, just peace for a thousand-year period called the Millennium. The Bible says that we as Christians will rule and reign with Jesus during that time. And heaven and earth will essentially become one.

Do you want His kingdom to come? Do you really want Him to return? Can you say, like the Apostle John, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20). Would it thrill your heart if you knew Christ was coming tonight to establish His kingdom? Or would you rather say, “Even so, come a little bit later, Lord Jesus. I have a few things I want to do first. I have some things I want to accomplish. I have several things I have to stop doing before You come, because I don’t want You to come while I am doing them.” If so, some changes need to be made in your life. Every Christian should be able to pray for the coming of God’s kingdom with fervency.

Pray for God's Kingdom to Enter Your Personal Life.

On the other hand, we are also praying on a personal level when we pray this request. We are praying for His kingdom to come into our lives. Remember what Jesus told Pontius Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight so that I should not be delivered up to the Jews”... (John 18:36). Jesus was essentially saying, “Pilate, do not misunderstand. I have not come to overthrow Rome and establish an earthly kingdom. My kingdom is not of this world. It is not about a political party. It is not about a physical city. It is about My rule and reign in the lives of men and women, boys and girls.”

On another occasion, Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). In Matthew 6:33, Jesus tells us, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” The kingdom of God speaks of the rule and reign of Jesus in your heart and life. When you pray for His kingdom to come into your life, you are saying, “Lord, I want You to rule and reign. I want to live by Your principles found in Your Word. I want to give You the master key to every door in my house—my family, my business, my finances, my future. Come in.”

Remember, though, you cannot pray, “Your kingdom come,” until you first pray, “My kingdom go.” Never be afraid to ask for the will of God. Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God. He has your best interests at heart.

Pray for His Kingdom to Be Extended in the Lives of Others.

When we pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done,” we are also praying for His rule and reign in the lives of others. One way that God’s kingdom is brought to this earth is when a new soul is brought to Jesus. Every time someone puts his faith in Christ, you could say that the kingdom of God has been extended a little further. In essence, “Your kingdom come” is also an evangelistic prayer. It serves as a reminder that we should be praying for the salvation of those who do not yet know the Lord.

Jesus Himself modeled this for us in Scripture. The prophet Isaiah, describing Jesus, said, He “made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). Jesus’ first words from the cross were a prayer: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). Jesus was praying for these people, and it resulted in at least one conversion that day—the conversion of one of the thieves crucified alongside Him.

Do you know someone you could not even imagine being a Christian? Maybe it is some antagonist in your family, or someone from your workplace who just drives you crazy. He is always arguing, always mocking. She is constantly giving you a hard time. Start specifically praying for that person to come to Christ. No one is beyond the reach of prayer.

Paul gives us a model for evangelistic prayer in his letter to Timothy:

I exhort first of all that supplications, prayer, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:1–4)

The word *intercession* used in that passage could be translated “to fall in with someone.” It speaks of identifying with someone and sensing his need. It means that you have compassion on that person. The point is this: I am not going to share the gospel with someone—much less pray for him or her—if I do not honestly care about that individual’s plight and situation.

As we pray for His kingdom to come in the lives of others, we must remember that those who are not believers have been taken captive by Satan to do his will (2 Timothy 2:26). They do not know who is in charge. We may easily feel angry toward them because of the things they do and the lifestyles they espouse, but we must remember that they are under Satan’s control and influence. That alone should make us pray all the more for their salvation.

Chapter Four

Confession ACTS

Next comes “confession.” The closer we draw to God, the more we sense our own sinfulness. This is illustrated in Isaiah chapter six where the prophet Isaiah writes,

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim . . . and one cried to another and said, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” So I said, “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips. . . .” (Isaiah 6:1–3, 5)

It is interesting that prior to that experience, Isaiah had a lot of “woes” for other people. But when he stood in the presence of God for a time, he said, “Woe is me.” He saw himself for who he was when he saw God for who He is.

In the presence of God, we become aware of our shortcomings. As you come to prayer, you may not think you have anything to confess. But if you pray a prayer like David did in Psalm 139, “Search me, O God, and know my heart . . . see if there is any wicked way in me,” God will show you those things.

God does not expose your sin to drive you to despair. God’s

Holy Spirit never convicts you of your sin to drive you away. The Holy Spirit convicts you of your sin to draw you nearer to Him. The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). To confess means that you are saying, “Lord, I agree with You. I have sinned. I am sorry. Show me what is wrong, because I want all barriers that might separate You from me to be removed.”

In the second part of “The Lord’s Prayer,” Jesus says that we should pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). The word *debts* can also be translated sins or trespasses. It refers to our shortcomings and the wrong things we have done. More importantly, Jesus is teaching that we need to pray for forgiveness on a regular—even daily—basis.

You can pray the most beautiful prayer, but if your heart is not right before God and there is un-confessed sin in your life, your prayer will go no higher than the ceiling. The psalmist said, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Psalm 66:18). So confession is essential.

In the second part of Matthew 6:12, we see that we must also be willing to forgive others. Basically, Jesus is saying, “As you are receiving the forgiveness from God for the wrong that you have done, be sure to extend that same forgiveness to others who have wronged you.” In short, forgiven people should be forgiving people. A man once came to John Wesley and said, “I never forgive and I never forget.” Wesley replied, “Well, sir, I

hope then that you never sin.”

Are you willing to be judged with the same judgment by which you judge others? We have to recognize that we are going to sin—and that people are going to sin against us. Everyone is flawed, just like you and me. Consequently, we are going to hurt each other from time to time. That is why we must learn how to forgive. If there is no forgiveness, a root of bitterness will grow in its place. Un-forgiveness is choosing to love hate. It produces bitterness, anger, rage, anxiety, and depression. Simply put, it is sin. For that reason, we must forgive.

Forgiveness is like taking a piece of pottery that represents something that someone has done to you and smashing it into a thousand pieces. There is no way it can ever be put together again. It is over with. You have to let it go.

Do you want to become like Jesus? Then you should reflect His character: “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Chapter Five

Thanksgiving ACTS

Our immediate response after confession should be thanksgiving, because we are thankful for what God has done for us. He has cleansed us. He has forgiven us. And, as David said in Psalm 32:1, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.”

Now why should I give thanks unto the Lord? Should I give thanks to God because everything is going perfectly in my life? No. Should I give thanks to God because I am in a good mood? No. Should I give thanks to God because it just seems like a good thing to do at the moment? No. The Bible says, “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever” (Psalm 107:1). You should give thanks to Him when you feel like it—and even when you do not feel like it.

Consider the case of Paul and Silas when they were thrown into a Roman prison for preaching the gospel. Prisons back then were far more primitive than they are today. Archaeologists have discovered what they think is the actual prison where Paul and Silas were imprisoned as recorded in the

book of Acts. It is nothing more than a dark, damp hole in the ground, with no ventilation—a hot and horrible environment.

First, Paul and Silas were whipped by the jailer. Then their feet were fastened into metal stocks, and their legs were spread as far apart as humanly possible, causing excruciating pain. Did they curse God? Did they say, “How could a God of love do this to us?” No. They prayed and they praised the Lord. They realized it was time to pray: “At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25). Songs, not groans came from their mouths. Instead of cursing men they were blessing God. No wonder the other prisoners were listening!

When you are in pain, the midnight hour is not the easiest time to have a worship service. But God gives songs in the night. The psalmist tells us, “The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me—a prayer to the God of my life” (Psalm 42:8). C. H. Spurgeon once said, “Any fool can sing in the day. It is easy to sing when you can read the notes by daylight. But the skillful singer is he who can sing when there is not a ray of light to read by. Songs in the night come only from God. They are not the power of men.”

As I worship the Lord and give thanks to Him, I am simply expressing gratitude for what I already have, and it prevents my focus from shifting to what I do not have. You can moan, “Why don’t I have this? Oh, poor me.” But when you thank

the Lord and think about who He is and all that He has done for you, you will suddenly realize that you have a lot going for you in life.

What should you be thankful for? Most notably, as a believer, your name is written in the Book of Life. God is still on the throne. You are going to see Him one day. Better yet, no person or thing can change that. Now that is a great deal to be thankful for! Never leave out this important aspect of prayer.

Chapter Six

Supplication ACTS

The last step of our prayer should be bringing our personal petitions before the Lord. If we are faithful in the first three steps, this last step will not degrade into some kind of a spiritual shopping list.

As you spend time in adoration, confession, and thanksgiving, your requests might actually change from what they had been at the outset. You might have wanted to pray, “Lord, change my wife. She is so intolerant. Give her more patience.” But after spending more time in the presence of God and thinking about yourself, you will change your prayer to, “Lord, change me. Help me not to be such a jerk.”

Earlier on you might have prayed, “Lord, I want you to judge this person who has done this to me.” But after you have spent time in the presence of God, you might pray, “Lord, forgive me for being so unforgiving. Please, change my heart.”

When you precede your petitions with adoration, confession, and thanksgiving, you are aligning yourself with the will of

God. And that is the objective of effective prayer. If you want to see your prayers answered more often in the affirmative, learn to pray according to the will of God.

Praying for Personal Needs

There is a place for supplication, a place for telling God about your personal needs. In Jesus' model of prayer for the disciples, He includes the request, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). This is basically a request for God's provision. There may be a time in your life when a petition like this really resonates with you. You might not know where your next meal is coming from. You might have some financial needs. It is really an amazing thing to consider that this all-knowing, all-powerful God, who created the universe, would have any interest in you or me. Nevertheless, He does, and He has promised to meet the needs of our lives.

You don't have to feel any shame about bringing your needs before the Lord. That is exactly what He wants you to do. The Bible tells you to "[cast] all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). And the apostle Paul told the Philippians,

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Scripture tells us to bring our requests to God. Nothing is too big or too small to pray about. What happens after we present our requests? Does He promise to make all your problems disappear and to meet every single need immediately? No. He

promises His peace.

That is not to say that God will not take your problems away. Sometimes He does. Yet there may be times when you pray for someone to be physically healed—and they get worse. Or you may pray for a certain situation in your life—and it becomes even more difficult. You may be thinking, “Excuse me, God. Do You have a short circuit here? Did You hear me properly?”

While God does not promise that He will take your problems away immediately, He does promise that His peace will guard your heart and mind. The word *guard* used in this verse comes from a Roman military term that means to mount a garrison. In other words, God will mount a garrison around your heart and mind: the peace of God will guard you. Better yet, it is a peace that “surpasses all understanding.” That is the reason why prayer is God’s antidote to worry.

Perhaps you are personally doing quite well at the moment. Your bills are paid. Your needs are met. Your stomach is full. There is enough food in the refrigerator to cover you for the next week. For you, this part of prayer is not so much a request as it is an affirmation. You are affirming that everything you have comes from the Lord’s hand. You are affirming that He has provided for you in the past and will continue to in the future.

Praying for Spiritual Strength

In “The Lord’s Prayer,” Jesus also uses the phrase, “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”

(Matthew 6:13). Jesus is not implying that God leads us into temptation, for the Bible explains that “each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (James 1:14).

In this petition, we are asking God to guide us so that we will not get out of His will and place ourselves in the way of temptation. We are essentially praying, “Lord, don’t let me be tempted above my capacity to resist. Give me common sense. Help me to see the areas of vulnerability in my life and to avoid the pitfalls.”

As one writer has said, “When we pray, ‘Lead us not into temptation,’ it is an appeal to God to put a watch over our eyes, our ears, our mouth, our feet, and our hands. That is everything we see, hear, or say, or any place we go and in anything we do, that He will protect us from sin.” Jesus recognized the enormous pull of sin and that is why He included this personal request to resist temptation as part of this model prayer.

The Key to Answered Prayer

Have you ever been frustrated because your prayers seem to go unanswered? Let me close with this simple truth. Remember that prayer is not moving God my way. It is moving myself God’s way. Prayer is not getting my will on earth. Prayer is a process whereby God aligns my desires with His. Jesus promised, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you”

(John 15:7). A more literal rendering of that verse would be, “If you maintain a living communion with Me, and My word is at home in you, you can ask at once for yourself whatever your heart desires, and it will be yours.”

When people hear this verse, they often envision a sort of genie in the bottle scenario. They think this verse means that they can pray for anything and receive it. But before you get all excited about what you are going to ask God for, maybe you should think about the first part of that verse: “If you abide in Me and My words abide in you. . . .” To abide in Christ means that you are maintaining a living and continuing fellowship with Jesus. You are rooted firmly in Him. His Word is at home in your heart. In time, you become so in tune with God and His Word that you begin to know what God wants. Eventually, the desires of His heart become the desires of your own. That is when you really begin seeing answered prayer.

Effective prayer flows out of a close walk with God. Our prayers cannot be divorced from our lifestyles. If your life is not pleasing to God, your prayer life will be non-existent. You may do little token prayers when you remember, but that will be the extent of it. But if you are truly a believer who is walking with God, prayer will not be a mere drudgery or duty for you; it will be a privilege you will take advantage of on a regular basis.

Prayer is not just trying to get God to move. It is an important process through which God moves and changes us. In other

words, prayer will not only transform whatever you are praying about; it will transform you.

Follow Jesus' example and become a person of prayer. Your life will never be the same.

Lord, teach us to pray!

If you have made a decision to follow Christ and would like more information on living as a Christian, please contact Harvest Ministries.

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